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ABSTRACT

The review of current research presented here describes literature dealing either directly or indirectly with school-age latchkey children. Implications of this research are suggested as they relate to the following questions: Are latchkey children at risk? If so, at how much risk and in which areas? Are there factors that mitigate or lead to greater risk? What are the long term effects, whether positive or negative, of the latchkey experience? If self-care appears to reduce risks that outweigh the opportunities it provides, what might be done to change this proportion? It is argued that these and other questions need to be addressed more fully before intervention strategies, briefly described in the last section of the paper, can be successful. (MP)

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LATCHKEY CHILDREN

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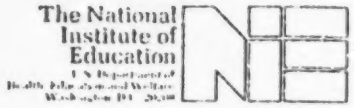

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> More than half the nation's children have mothers who work away from home, the Bureau of Labor Statistics of the United States Department of Labor reported today. About 31.8 million children below age 18--54% of the nation's total--had mothers in the labor force in March 1981. This number has risen steadily throughout the past decade, even though the size of the children's population has declined substantially.
>
> (United States Department of Labor News, USDL 81-522, November 15, 1981)

Two significant changes in social structure occurring during the 1970s dramatically changed family patterns in the United States. These were a large increase in the proportion of mothers who work and increased numbers of children living in single-parent households. These two changes contributed to two related changes: the number of children living in poverty and the rapid rise of children left unattended, or "latchkey children."

What Is Meant by "Latchkey Children?"

In the 18th century, the term "latchkey" denoted the implement used for gaining access to one's house--for lifting the door latch, in other words. During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the term was sometimes applied in relation to young single ladies who went about unchaperoned, thus requiring a key to gain access to their homes. The first clear print reference to American latchkey children, indicating young children left to shift for themselves while thier parents worked and associating the symbol of the housekey tied around the child's neck, appears to be in Zucker (1944). While the term was not novel, Zucker referred to the newly coined phrases "latchkey" or "doorkey" children, or "8-hour orphans," in his article of that date.

At present and in the context of this chapter, "latchkey" generally defines children who are left to take care of themselves, to use group recreational programs, play in the street, stay home alone, join a gang, or in general, to supervise themselves--or for whom care arrangements are so loosely made as to be virtually ineffective. Specifically, the term refers to children who are regularly left unattended or who are only attended by another underage child most days, when ill, during school holidays, snow days, teacher workshop days, and vacation periods, or whenever these children's schedules do not jibe with the usual schedules of their primary adult caregivers. Latchkey does not refer to children infrequently left alone for short periods of time while their adult caregiver runs an errand, picks up a sibling from an athletic event, visits a neighbor, or even goes out for an evening without otherwise providing adequate supervision.

The above definition of latchkey children can apply to 3- or 4-year-olds whose parents routinely and intentionally leave them unattended for some period of time most days. This situation occurs though perhaps not frequently. (The United States Department of Labor reported in 1977, for example, that 20,000 3- to 6-years-olds were in self-care.) The term can also apply to those 15- or 16-year-olds who are routinely left unattended in their own homes before or after school while their parents work or while their parents spend extended periods of time away from home (several weeks, for example). Situations like these occur with some regularity, and many adolescents routinely find themselves unsupervised by their absent parents at all hours of the day and night.

The latchkey population of greatest current concern, however, is the 5- to 13-year-old group. Even in 1975 the federal government identified 1,575,000 such children of employed mothers as being in self-care (United

States Department of Labor, 1977). Five- to 13-year-olds constitute the largest group of latchkey children considered most at risk, and they are those most frequently left to take care of themselves during periods in which their school schedules fail to overlap the work and work-related travel schedules of their parents.

Some readers might disagree with a definition of children in self-care that includes young children routinely supervised by teenagers, believing 15- or 16-year-olds to be adequate caregivers not only for themselves, but also for younger children left in their charge. Nonetheless, growing concerns exist about the risk to young children as the result of physical and sexual abuse perpetrated by underage but still older caretakers (Finkelhor, 1979; Rogers, 1982). This would lead one to wonder whether no care might be preferred to abusive care. However, there is no wish to argue here whether adolescents can adequately respond to the demands of serving as substitute parents. Some do and some don't. Certainly a 15-year-old charged with the care of an 8-year-old can often provide a better care environment than no care at all. It is important to note, though, that most children left to care for each other are relatively close in age. It is more common to find a 12-year-old charged with the care of an 8-year-old than it is to find an older adolescent sibling providing the caregiving function for that younger child.

Nonrelated older teenagers are often employed as babysitters, however. And, though data in this area are sparse, growing evidence indicates that children between the ages of 12 and 14 are given much more responsibility for younger children than in the past. A recent study (Medrich, 1982) of time use among a diverse sample of Oakland, California, youth showed that 66% of 11- to 14-year-olds care for younger siblings at some point in the

week. Ten percent of these have daily childcare responsibilities, and 23% have responsibilities two to five days a week. Another study indicates that older elementary school-age children take considerable responsibility for younger children when the parent is not at home (Long & Long, 1982).

The thrust of this review, then, is to summarize what little is known about school-age latchkey children, and, it is hoped, to prompt more research into the area and to stimulate whatever solutions identified problems might demand.

How Many Latchkey Children Are There?

The exact number of latchkey children remains elusive, since the numbers reported are generally accepted as partial and the most recently available general study is itself dated (United States Department of Commerce, 1976). The fact that a current comprehensive and reliable tally of children enrolled in the various forms of child care is as yet unavailable is perhaps indicative of the low level of importance the nation places on the care of its children. But there are some encouraging signs. The United States Department of Health and Human Services has issued its seven-volume National Day Care Home Study (Divine-Hawkins, 1981) and has funded a partial study of child care for school-age children. Data for this latter study began to be collected during 1982 in the states of Pennsylvania and Virginia by Applied Management Sciences of Silver Spring, Maryland.

Janet Simons and Halcyon Bohen (1982) estimate that approximately 5.2 million young American children (age 13 and under) of parents employed full-time are without adult care or supervision for significant parts of each day. Other investigations conducted by various organizations and researchers present additional data on the question of the number of latchkey children. In 1976 the United States Department of Commerce

Bureau of the Census reported that 18% of children ages 7 to 13 cared for themselves while their mothers worked full-time. It is hard to imagine that this percentage has declined since 1975. According to Lopata (1978), of full-time employed mothers with children ranging from 3 to 13, 12.9% report that their children care for themselves on a regular basis. In a study by McMurray and Kazanjian (1982) 19% of the families involved admitted that they had to leave their children unsupervised during all or part of the day, with over one-fifth of the parents beginning such practices when the children were 7 years old or younger. Admittedly, this population is unusual in that it was working poor, most of whom had lost eligibility for publically supported child care subsidies.

In a study carried out by Long and Long (1982) it was found that one of every three elementary school children in the Washington, D. C., school surveyed regularly engaged in some form of self-care. It is also true that among the nation's ten largest metropolitan areas, Washington's labor force has the highest proportion of working women (R. Smith, 1979). Moreover, interviews with children in selected schools in Washington's wealthiest suburbs indicated that between 11 and 12% of these children fit the definition of latchkey (Long & Long, in press).

It is likely that the average of American children routinely left in self-care varies depending on locale and the composition of the community. The high figure of one-third for some areas has been corroborated by a recently released study by Hughes (1982). The Hughes study, conducted for the Association for Supportive Child Care, sampled major employers in Maricopa County, Arizona, to generate a list of employees with children under 12 years of age in which both parents or the single head of household was employed outside the home. Of the 144 employee families that

participated, 62% were married couples and 38% were single heads of household. There were 207 children under 12 years of age in these families; 114 children were 5 years of age or under, while 93 were age 6 through 11. In 31% of the families with children ages 6 through 11, children cared for themselves on most weekdays.

In a survey of child care practices conducted by Family Circle magazine, 30% of mothers reported that their school-age children under 13 were left at home alone after school (as reported in Friedman, 1979). In a survey conducted by Louis Harris (1981) for General Mills, Inc., only 9% of the families surveyed making use of childcare arrangements besides parental care reported that their children cared for themselves. Unfortunately, this question was posed in such a way that children who took care of each other were generally not counted in the self-care category. Nicholas Zill (1983) reports from a study conducted in 1976 that among his sample of 2,301 children age 4 through 11 fewer than 5% were latchkey.

Where the percentage of families with a working single parent is high, even the one-third figure might be a low average. Our preference is to stay with the figure of approximately 6 million latchkey children 13 years of age or under, since this figure seems conservative and at present public concern is most focused on this age group. Regardless of discrepancies among findings, the bottom line is that whatever the actual figure, a large number of children in America spend some portion of most days each year caring for themselves, and this number is growing.

Is Self-Care Really a Problem?

More than a year ago James Garbarino (1981) asked whether the latchkey child was a problem. He conceded that some latchkey children "feel rejected," were "prone to become involved in delinquent behavior,"

and were more likely to become "victims of accidents" and "sexual victimization by siblings and non-parental adults." But he also suggested that we don't know how many children do suffer such adverse consequences and indeed asserted that latchkey children may find that their situations promote development because of the greater demands placed on them to act independently and responsibly.

David Elkind (1981), however, contends that the rush to have children grow up quickly produces unnecessary stress. Children respond to stress in a variety of ways, including developing anxiety that is not attached to a specific fear. This type of fear is often experienced as a result of separations, including the continuing though temporary separation occasioned by parents' jobs. Under stress, children often cope by overstructuring their environments. As reported by Elkind, this characteristic has been a trade-mark of low-income children, who often appear to attain independence early in response to living in single-parent families or in households in which all adults work outside the home, as well as in reaction to poverty. These situations demand growing up rapidly.

At present the pressures on children to act grown-up prematurely in order to satisfy family or parental needs, often for the same reasons thought in the 1950s to be common only among the lower class, has gained a strong foothold across a wide sweep of American society. There is a possibility that premature life structuring among children will lead to lowered achievement and increased social and emotional problems in their later lives, as has apparently been the case among the children of the nation's working poor for decades. But then not every child responds to situations that are normally stressful by crumbling, or burning out, or producing at less than potential (Pinas, 1979).

The practice of older children caring for younger ones is widespread in non-Western societies, where children typically take on responsibilities that range from complete and independent full-time care of children to childcare tasks under adult supervision (Whiting & Edwards, 1973; Rogoff, Sellers, Pirotta, Fox, & White, 1975; Weisner & Gallimore, 1977). But because mothers have been the primary caregivers in Western industrialized societies, little attention has been given to childcare by children themselves. Psychologists are in fact divided about the advisability of giving children caregiving responsibility for themselves or other children.

In the few school programs that have engaged junior high school students as aides in preschools, young adolescents are reported to be "still near enough to childhood to identify spontaneously with children's interests, feelings, and behavior (Mallum, unpublished). We lack information, however, about how they handle childcare in unsupervised situations. Research and theory on early adolescence, and on the transition into puberty, do not provide clear predictions about the ways in which early adolescents will perceive and handle childcare. While there is general agreement that major biological, psychological, and social changes take place during the period from 11 to 14 years of age, this period has been viewed by some as highly stressful and disorienting (Freud, 1958; Erikson, 1968; Mead, 1970; Muuss, 1975) and by others as impressively stable and continuous (Bandura, 1964; Douvan & Adelson, 1966; Hill, 1980; Rutter, 1980; Dusek & Flaherty, 1981). To the extent that social or cognitive disorientation may take place, their implications for young adolescents' childcare abilities have never been addressed.

The continuity and similarity that some writers have pointed out between preschool and early adolescent development (Feeney, 1980) could

lead to a strengthened ability to identify with a younger child or to difficulties for the adolescent in separating his or her needs from the child's. Elkind's (1967) conception of adolescent egocentrism suggests that young adolescents' preoccupation with how others see them could create difficulty in taking the younger child's viewpoint. Cobb's (1975) study confirms this problem.

Are latchkey children at risk? If so, at how much risk? In which areas are they at risk? Are there factors that lead to greater risk? Factors that mitigate risk? What are the long term effects, whether positive or negative, of the latchkey experience? If self-care appears to produce risks that outweigh the opportunities it provides, what might be done to change this proportion? These and other questions need to be answered. Since the current magnitude of the latchkey phenomenon has been expressed quietly only during the past 30 years, little in the way of data directly applicable to these questions exists. And yet some information at least illustrative of the scope and complexity of the latchkey phenomenon has emerged.

THE CONTEXT OF LATCHKEY RESEARCH

The body of research literature that deals at least contextually with latchkey children has attempted to determine whether children are benefited or injured by living with a mother who works outside the home (Nye & Hoffman, 1963; Taveggia & Thomas, 1974; Duncan & Morgan, 1975; Feldman, 1978; Moore, 1978; Dellas, Gaier, & Emihovich, 1979; Hoffman, 1979; Price, 1979; Rallings & Nye, 1979; R. E. Smith, 1979; Etaugh, 1980; Kamerman & Kahn, 1981; Lueck, Orr, & O'Connell, 1982.) The growing consensus of this research is that the adverse effects on children and on

parent/child relationships, feared by many as a result of maternal employment, have not occurred.

An early article by Mathews dealing with the effect of mothers' out-of-home employment on children was published in 1934, but most published research about this problem did not begin to appear until about 1950. Of the articles published between 1950 and 1970, most used criterion variables dealing with intellectual performance, emotional and/or physical development, indicators of school achievement, measures of social behavior, or measures of children's ideas and/or attitudes (Nye, 1952; Rouman, 1956; Glueck & Glueck, 1957; Hand, 1957; Cartwright & Jeffreys, 1958; Nye, 1959; Siegel, Stoltz, Hitchcock, & Adamson, 1959; Hartley, 1960; Hoffman, 1961; Peterson, 1961, Roy, 1961; McCord, McCord, & Turber, 1963; Nye & Hoffman, 1963; Scott, 1965; Banducci, 1967; George & Thomas, 1967; Jones, Lundsteen, & Michael, 1967; and Nelson, 1969). Combined results of these studies generally showed no difference between the children of mothers who worked and mothers who did not work, although many scattered differences in results did appear. To date most research dealing with the impact of maternal employment on children has assumed the alternative of continuous childcare, seldom considering whether or not the children were fending for themselves while their parents were working out-of-home.

Harris (1981) conducted a survey on American families for General Mills, Inc. The sample of 1,503 adult family members was drawn from the civilian population over age 18 residing in the contiguous United States. All interviews were conducted by telephone, using a procedure known as random-digit-dialing.

Most interesting of the results obtained from the family members polled by Harris was the fact that almost twice as many respondents thought that the effect of both parents working outside the home was negative as thought the effect was positive. The reason most often cited for this suspected negative effect on families concerned the belief that children needed stronger parental guidance, supervision, and discipline than those questioned thought could be provided when both parents in the household were employed. On the positive side, about nine family members in 10 polled by Harris believed that when both parents worked, children had to become more self-reliant and independent. Eight of 10 thought this was good.

The clash between the consensus of research writing and common opinion can lead one to wonder whether collective research wisdom is more accurate than collective common opinion, or whether family members are considering reality factors as yet unexamined by researchers. To put the Harris poll in perspective, work was not seen as the sole factor influencing attitudes toward current changes in childcare. Certainly the perception of the deterioration in the overall quality of parenting is widespread. A majority of all groups polled by Harris (except for a sample drawn from a selected list of women's leaders and groups published by the White House in 1980 and for participants of the National Organization for Women's Legal Defense Fund Program) believed that even when parents stay at home, they don't give their children the time and attention needed. The majority of Harris's family members felt that when both parents work children were more likely to get into trouble and the parents were more likely to indulge their children to make up for the time spent apart. This same group, however, also felt that work and childrearing were generally compatible

despite the time demands of work, if the quality of time spent with children was good. An equally positive opinion was that the child is benefited when mothers and fathers play an equal role in caring for children--an attitude shared by a growing number of researchers.

CURRENT LATCHKEY RESEARCH

Zucker's (1944) picture of wartime latchkey children, as described earlier in this chapter, somehow seems quite modern. His answer to the question of whether or not it was harmful for a mother to work was that it depended on whether or not she could make adequate childcare arrangements. Without meticulously detailing the extent of the latchkey problem in 1944, Zucker clearly believed that war-bred latchkey children would become the problem adolescents of the 1950s and the maladjusted parents of the 1960s. Even his suggestions for ameliorating latchkey problems seem applicable today. But to what extent does the research illuminate the effect of the latchkey experience on children?

Cognitive Functioning and Adjustment

Woods (1968, 1972), following the lead of previous research, investigated developmental variables relating to achievement, intelligence, personal and social adjustment, health, family relationships, and school and community behavior in a group of fifth-grade black ghetto children from Philadelphia. Her primary purpose, however, was to determine whether those children who reported they had little or no maternal supervision during the summer and during criterion periods of the school day differed from children who experienced almost continuous supervision.

Woods' findings were that while the teachers at school could not distinguish between supervised and unsupervised children, there were a

number of significant differences between groups of girls with regard to academic achievement and school relations. Unsupervised girls, of which in this study there were significantly more than unsupervised boys, exhibited marked deficits in cognitive functioning and personality adjustment. In contrast, children who reported mature substitute supervision were more self-reliant.

Woods collected her data from children using a series of paper-and-pencil instruments. She also solicited written evaluations from teachers; checked school, local hospital, and police records for all her subjects; and interviewed 38 mothers. In addition to the deficits noted, Woods found positive relationships between mothers' attitudes toward their works and childcare roles, the quality of mother/child relationships and the children's achievement, intelligence, and personality. She surmised that maternal employment might be differentially associated with the development of children depending on the family's social class, but she did not test this hypothesis.

Following suggestions made by Woods, Gold and Andres (1978-a) investigated the differing conceptions of sex roles in children of employed and unemployed mothers by social class. The subjects were 223 10-year-old Canadian children who came from two-parent families with no history of parental death or divorce. All data collected were obtained on paper-and-pencil measures.

The areas of greatest interest to this discussion are the investigation's inquiry into social class differences and the supervisory arrangements parents made for their children. Gold and Andres (1978-a) found that significantly more nonemployed mothers indicated that only they supervised their children in the evenings and on weekends, while employed

mothers indicated that both parents supervised their children. This finding stands in contrast to results reported by Pedersen (1982) in which American fathers with unemployed wives spent significantly more time with their children upon return home from work than did fathers whose wives were also employed.

Of the 20 unsupervised children with employed mothers in the Gold and Andres (1978-a) study (16% of the total number of children with employed mothers), 16 were boys, 11 from middle-class and five from working-class families. When researchers divided the sons of employed mothers into supervised and unsupervised groups for comparison, the unsupervised boys were consistently lower on all adjustment and academic achievement test scores, but none of these differences reached significance.

In a companion study of 14- to 16-year-old Canadian youths, Gold and Andres (1978-b) focused on hypotheses similar to those in their study of 10-year-olds. Again of special interest to our discussion, approximately half of the employed and nonemployed mothers indicated that they did not supervise their children's free time. Supervised and unsupervised children were compared on sex-role concept measures, adjustment test scores, academic achievement, and intelligence scores. The unsupervised children had slightly lower adjustment and academic scores, but few of those differences reached significance.

Children's Fears

In a study by Zill (1983), boys and girls ages 7 through 11 were asked if they worried when they had to stay at home without any grown-ups to watch them. Thirty-two percent of the boys and 41% of the girls said, "Yes." When the children were further asked which of several

possibilities made them feel afraid, the most frequent issue identified was that somebody bad might get into their house (62% of the boys and 75% of the girls). The next most frequent issue seen as frightening was when their parents argued (48% of the boys and 56% of the girls). Girls also indicated that they were afraid of thunder and lightening (46%). Otherwise, less than one-third of either the boys or girls said they were frightened by any other item.

A study conducted and subsequently reported by Galambos and Garbarino (1982) at the annual convention of the American Psychological Association attempted to answer questions relating to whether a lack of supervision affected school adjustment, academic achievement, orientation to the classroom, and fear of going outdoors alone in fifth- and seventh-grade students who were regularly unsupervised before or after school and who had mothers employed outside the home. Children in this group were compared with continuously supervised children of employed mothers and continuously supervised children of nonemployed mothers. All measures were of the paper-and-pencil type, some completed by the children and others completed by teachers who had known the children for at least three months.

No significant main effects or interactions were found for any supervision/maternal employment status group. The results suggest that latchkey children reared in a relatively safe rural environment perform no differently in school than nonlatchkey children, nor are they more fearful of being outside alone. Galambos and Garbarino suggest that community and neighborhood characteristics may influence how well the child is able to adjust to the latchkey situation. One possibility is that in neighborhoods perceived as safe, the latchkey child more likely will be allowed to

play outside, a fact that perhaps leads to better adjustment than if the child is required to stay indoors.

Underreporting of Self-Care Arrangements

Georgia McMurray and Dolores Kazanjian (1982) carried out a study of how poor working families involved in New York City's public day care programs manage their family life and work responsibilities. Results were based on home interviews with 211 individuals. Of the respondents in this study, 70% were single parents, 94% were female, and 95% were from a racial minority. One hundred three of those interviewed were from a group of families whose children had been terminated from public day care services, 59 were from families whose children were still enrolled in such services, and 49 were from families whose children were on a waiting list for these services. Of all respondents, 56% were employed at the time the data was collected, 15% were looking for work, and 95% had worked at some time since the birth of their first child. Overall, this study focused on the most vulnerable segment of the population--urban working poor, single parents, minority individuals, and families headed by women.

For purposes of this review the most striking finding of the study was that only 58% of the families interviewed were using childcare on a regular basis, a low percentage, while analysis of the data showed that only about 19% of the parents who were employed admitted that they made no arrangements for the care of children. McMurray and Kazanjian (1982) are sensitive to the underreporting of the latchkey phenomenon. By analyzing the number of hours of care reported and comparing that to the number of hours of employment in their sample, they estimate that more than half of the children in their study were regularly or occasionally left without supervision for part of the day while their parents worked.

In a study by Long and Long (in press) in which interviews with approximately 100 parents were conducted, it was evident that parents were reluctant to leave their children alone or to admit to having to resort to this arrangement. Some parents interviewed said that while they routinely left their children unattended, they would never admit this to their own parents and actually tried to keep the reality of their child's self-care as little known as possible.

Part of the reason Long and Long found for underreporting, a reason also cited by McMurray and Kazanjian (1982), is that parents who leave a 7-year-old in the care of a 10-year-old, for example, do not consider this to be leaving either child "alone." McMurray and Kazanjian (1982) report that the median age of children surveyed when first left alone was 9.8 years. Long and Long (1982) found that children, when asked when they first began staying home alone, reported a median age of 8, if left by themselves, and 6, if left with some other underage child, usually a sibling.

It is interesting to note in the McMurray and Kazanjian study that almost one-quarter of the parents reporting that they left their children unattended reported also that they began this practice when their children were age 7 or younger; 10% indicated beginning self-care for children at age 3 or younger. By the time children reached age 12, as McMurray and Kazanjian indicate, 95% of all of their subjects' children were staying by themselves. Further, when asked whether any of their children under 14 had responsibility for looking after younger brothers and sisters, almost 30% of the parents said yes. This figure parallels that found by Long and Long (1982) when they interviewed minority children in Washington, D. C. In the McMurray and Kazanjian study the median age at which children

assumed responsibility for caring for a younger sibling was 10.6 years, some caring for siblings as young as 1 year old. Again, this data parallels the Long and Long (1982) study.

The Choice of Self-Care

In reporting how parents came to the decision to leave children alone, McMurray and Kazanjian (1982) found that many factors played a part, including the parents' assessment of the age and maturity of the child, the parents' need to work, the availability of affordable and reliable childcare, the child's preference, and certain other environmental factors.

Long and Long (in press) found that parents did not carelessly choose self-care for their children simply because they wanted to work. The factors indicated by McMurray and Kazanjian were indeed considered by parents who opted for self-care, and those parents choosing self-care for their children usually did so with a great deal of concern (many said "guilt"), ambivalence, and uncertainty. Neither are most parents who employ a self-care arrangement for their children satisfied with this arrangement (McMurray and Kazanjian cite 46% of their respondents). They express concern for their child's safety and social development, and worry about the negative impact of too much television viewing. This they do, despite the fact that they and their children are also proud of the responsibility and independence latchkey children often appear to exhibit.

THE LATCHKEY EXPERIENCE

As reflected in a series of studies conducted in the Washington, D. C., metropolitan area (Long & Long, 1982; Long & Long, in press), including interviews with several hundred children, parents of latchkey

children and former latchkey children from families that range from working poor to affluent, a constellation of common concerns and experiences has begun to emerge.

The first Long and Long (1982) study was carried out in an all-black parochial school in Washington, D. C. Data from this study compares most easily with data obtained by Woods (1972) and McMurray and Kazanjian (1982), though differences among all these studies occur. It is probably important to point out that children interviewed in the Long and Long (1982) study cannot be considered typical of children enrolled in the public schools of the city of Washington--not because of religious affiliation (in fact, the majority were not Catholic), but because their parents could afford to pay an additional 750 dollars a year tuition per child to have them enrolled in a parochial school. This fact is mentioned only to indicate that the latchkey phenomenon occurs across a fairly broad sweep of income levels in the black community.

In the Long and Long (1982) study data were obtained by individually interviewing every latchkey child in first through sixth grades (30% of all children enrolled in these grades) following a structured protocol. This investigation appears to be the first reported attempt to obtain data directly from latchkey children.

Unlike the Woods (1972) or McMurray and Kazanjian (1982) studies, the latchkey children in the Long and Long (1982) study were almost equally divided as to sex. Figures in the last investigation as to the number of children living with a single parent (44% of the group left alone and 40% of the group left with siblings) almost exactly parallel the national average for black children living with only one parent (United States Department of Health and Human Services, 1982).

Length of Unsupervised Time

The children in the Long and Long (1982) study were without adult supervision an average of 2 1/4 hours each weekday if home alone, 3 hours if home with siblings. McMurray and Kazanjian (1982) report that three-quarters of their latchkey parents left their children alone for between 1 and 3 hours, and nearly one-fifth left their children unsupervised for between 4 and 8 hours, apparently on a daily basis. Florence Ruderman (1969), in a study conducted for the Child Welfare League of America, found that 36% of the children ages 9 to 11 of working mothers were alone for 1 hour each day and that 43% were left for up to 2 hours. The average of hours reported in all studies should be considered a minimum since it generally does not reflect parental delays in getting home or the full days children may be left unsupervised when ill or during holiday or vacation periods.

Most latchkey children do carry or have access to a house key. In suburban and rural areas the key may be hidden on the premises or the house may be left unlocked, thus providing easy access for the child should a key be lost. In urban areas lost keys pose a real problem for children. Of the children in the Long and Long (1982) study, 30% said that if they lost their keys, they would wait outside until an adult arrived. Many urban children were quite concerned about the possibility of losing their keys, and key loss was not an uncommon experience.

Restricted Freedoms

Parents of urban children often restrict the freedom of their children for safety's sake. Long and Long (1982) found that 43% of the children at home alone and 33% of those at home only with siblings could not play

outside. While 80% of the children home alone, 60% of the sibling boys, and 30% of the sibling girls were told that they could not have friends visit while their parents were away, such restrictions were much relaxed when children in suburbia were studied (Long & Long, in press). Freedom to engage in outside play seemed to be even more relaxed in a rural community (Galambos & Garbarino, 1982).

The Long and Long (1982, in press) data seem to indicate that contextual variables make a difference in how latchkey children behave and how the experience affects them. These results support those issues raised by Galambos and Garbarino (1982). Suburban latchkey children seem to be accorded greater freedom to play outside and make use of public recreational facilities than do urban children in self-care. Children who live in neighborhoods considered to be safer seem to exhibit less fear than those living in more crime-ridden neighborhoods. Children living in more affluent neighborhoods are less likely to be left unsupervised than those in less affluent neighborhoods.

Since nearly all children with continuous adult supervision are allowed regular play contact with their peers during out-of-school hours (Long & Long, 1982) latchkey children probably suffer some social deficit when their ability to play with peers is severely restricted.

Children's Perceptions of Self-Care

Long and Long (1982, in press) found that the number one complaint of latchkey children was loneliness or boredom. While it is not clear whether these same children might make the same complaint if they were under continuous adult supervision, those children who were so supervised did not make such a complaint to any significant degree.

The most startling finding in the Long and Long (1982) study was the elevated fear levels found among latchkey children. Fear levels were judged by five methods: (1) Did the child say he or she was afraid? (2) Did children use intense words to express fear, like "terrified" or "very frightened?" (3) Did children say they had recurring bad dreams? (4) Had children developed a plan of action for coping with expected fears? and (5) Did the interviewer rate the child as highly fearful as a result of impressions drawn from the interview in general?

Using these benchmarks and realizing that most children express some degree of fear at some time or another, investigators classed 30% of the latchkey children who were home alone and 20% of those routinely left at home with siblings but without continuous adult supervision as expressing unusually high levels of recurring fear. The most commonly expressed fear was that someone might break into the house, followed by fear of noises, of the dark, of rain, of thunder or lightening, or of animals barking or crying that might indicate the presence of some further danger.

These elevated levels of fear were found, but with much less frequency when children in affluent, suburban settings were interviewed (Long & Long, in press). These results might indicate that environmental factors, such as the customary or perceived safety of one's neighborhood, can play a distinct role in determining the impact of the latchkey experience.

Risks to Unattended Children

Children left alone are always at risk from natural assaults, as well as from those assaults caused by individuals around them. Fire deaths, for example, are disproportionately high among the young. Not skillful at

tasks which may put them in danger, children are curious to try what they see adults doing--using matches or cigarette lighters, for example. They are not always able to foresee the consequences of their acts and may be insubordinate and play with matches even though emphatically told not to do so. And too frequently children have not been trained in the rudiments of self-protection from fire or other emergency conditions.

Only Long and Long (1982, in press) have investigated the number and nature of emergencies latchkey children experience, or the responses of latchkey children to such emergencies. In the 1982 study, the investigators found that fewer than 5% of the children interviewed had been involved in an emergency they considered serious. This low percentage might be accounted for by the fact that the average age of the children at the time they were interviewed was 8.5 for those left with siblings and 9.5 for those left alone. When former latchkey children (a population which averaged nearly 9 years in latchkey arrangements) were interviewed, more than half recalled at least one serious emergency in which they had been involved while unattended. A great deal of additional data on local and national levels is needed about the risks experienced by children left unattended. No comprehensive data exist, for example, that outline abuse by siblings of children left alone together, even though Long and Long (in press) discovered that when siblings were left unattended together the majority complained that they fought and argued frequently. National figures report abuse involvement by underage siblings as abuse by mother/substitutes. This may account for the listing of 46% of sexual abuse cases, 72% of physical abuse cases, and 90% of all other maltreatment as attributable to mother/substitutes (United States Department of Health and Human Services, 1981).

The current role latchkey arrangements play in the abuse and neglect of children is an issue that wants for serious research attention. In much the same way we know little about the role lack of continuous adult supervision plays in juvenile delinquency. (This latter issue was poignantly illustrated in a report prepared by the Committee on School Age Child Care of the Arlington, Virginia, Health and Welfare Council [1969]).

Although about 2% of all children in the United States are abused each year, the majority of latchkey children will probably not be abused, nor will the majority become known to the courts, or become severely injured, or die by accident (even though accidents are the leading cause of death in children). However, these concerns should be investigated in light of supervision arrangements in order to give some insight into the impact of the latchkey phenomenon on those issues that society views as having the most serious consequences for children.

Effects of Parent/Child Relationship

While the risks of leaving children unattended are real, one factor Long and Long (1982) found that considerably moderated the undesirable impact of the latchkey experience was the closeness of the relationship the child experienced with one or both parents. These results support findings by Woods (1972) that those children who enjoyed the best relationships with their mothers had the highest achievement, best personality adjustment, highest verbal and language IQs, and the best reading achievement. Even teachers responded most favorably to those children who had the best mother/child relationships at home.

Children in the Long and Long (1982) study appeared to perceive a closer parental relationship if their parents engaged in activities with them

or expressed concern about their welfare, and if the parents responded when they enlisted aid in resolving conflicts. Children experiencing closer parent/child relationships also indicated that their parents told them that they loved them and/or acted loving toward them.

INTERVENTIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Large and increasing numbers of children are being left alone while their parents work. This reluctantly used arrangement puts a special burden on children, many of whom have outgrown usually available full-day care. Latchkey children are left unsupervised before and/or after school hours, and at other periods during which their schedules fail to correspond with the times their parents are available for supervision. Many children are also pressed into service to supervise younger siblings. These children are filling the gap between parent care and other forms of childcare that inadequately meet the needs of working parents.

Whether the lack of continuous supervision for our nation's children creates a problem and if so, of what magnitude, is a question not entirely settled. A growing amount of evidence seems to indicate that unsupervised subteens <u>are at risk</u> to a greater or lesser extent, depending on the context of their care arrangements (Wellborn, 1981). Even when assessments are made of the impact of poor or nonexistent supervision versus continuous adult supervision on such qualities as school achievement, school adjustment, and social behavior, results vary from no differences between groups to a negative impact on the unsupervised group. A great deal more research is needed to determine the full impact of self-care on children.

Survival Skills

Since children are being required to assume more responsibility for their own care and for the care of their siblings, and because the risks are high, there appears even now to be a strong need to give children better instruction in child development and survival skills. Two examples of such programs are described in Survival Skills Training for Kids (Pfafflin, 1982) and I'm in Charge (Swan, Briggs, & Kelson, 1982). A third book on the subject is ready to be released by Alfred A. Knopf (Kyte, in press), while Long and Long's book The Handbook for Latchkey Children and Their Parents (in press) will also soon be published.

Moreover, because so many women are now in the labor force, parents cannot assume that a neighbor will be available should their child at home alone need immediate assistance. This situation demands that the usual sources of emergency assistance (police or fire and rescue groups, for example) be better prepared to deal with the emergency needs of unattended children. There is perhaps also a growing need for alternative forms of assistance not only to help children cope with physical emergencies but also to help reduce loneliness, boredom, and fright. One such service is provided by the State College Branch of the American Association of University Women at the Pennsylvania State University (Guerney & Moore, 1982). This service, called "Phone Friend," makes a telephone hotline available in the area to provide empathic listening and reponding, help in problem solving, and referral for children. During its first 5 months of operation, 369 calls were answered--87 from children who were lonely, 50 from those who were bored, and 41 from those who were scared. Calls in these three categories accounted for more responses than all other types of calls combined.

Flexible Childcare Services

In addition to teaching children survival skills and providing services to help them while they are alone, there appears to be a growing demand for increased before- and after-school care and a greater variety of care arrangements suited to the demands of school-age children. Some of these arrangements will have the effect of providing continuous adult supervision for children. The extended-day programs operated in the elementary schools of Arlington and Fairfax Counties in Virginia are excellent examples of such programs. Others, such as neighborhood block mother programs or community recreation programs, will guarantee that at least one responsible adult will be home when children on the block need help. Such programs may also help break the monotony of the latchkey arrangement by providing regular community recreational activities that recognize the existence and needs of latchkey children, including provision for transporting children safely between such activities and their homes.

Many parents would make better use of already available community services if they knew these services existed. Improved information and referral services for parents are needed to identify not only public resources, but also private ones. Employers can be enlisted to help establish these child care information and referral services. Several employers can jointly establish a child care consortium, provide subsidized childcare projects through grants, or help generate parenting workshops. Flexible work hours for parents and provisions for employees to carry out assigned duties at home are only a few things employers can do to make parental fulfillment of childcare responsibilities easier.

Community organizations can also take leadership roles in bringing together a variety of community resources designed to relieve the problems

of unattended children. For example, an intergenerational model designed by Thomas Long for Young Volunteers in Action, a federal agency in Washington, D. C., showed how senior citizens could effectively be paired with juvenile volunteers to provide care for young children at an annual cost of about $600 per child. Existing homes for the elderly can expand their care concepts to involve the elderly in care activities for otherwise unattended youngsters. And community organizations, such as the YMCA, can expand their already sizeable network of after-school programs to accommodate a growing number of needy children. It is important to note in this regard that no one model or plan will satisfy the needs of all children or all families in all communities. Each community will likely require a number of approaches to adequately respond to family needs for childcare.

The issue of children in self-care is a complex one, not readily answered by a single solution. Even parents' decisions on the amount and type of childcare arrangements used are complex (Moore, 1982), including household structure, wage earners' employment status and annual income, cost of care, distance of care from home, and the necessity for regular or flexible care arrangements. Further, choices of care arrangements are mediated by race and ethnicity, educational level of parents, geographical region, and type of community in which the family lives. As a consequence, any community that wishes to help in supplying adequate childcare services must recognize the complexity of influences that affect the choices parents make and provide a variety of supportive services from which parents may choose, depending how they assess their own family situations.

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